

What is Your Verdict Who Jesus is?

Text: Exodus 1:8-2:10

Romans 12:1-8 (Series A. 12th Sunday after Pentecost) Ps. 124

Matthew 16:13-20

"Who do people say the Son of Man is?" "Some say John the Baptist," they answered. "Others say Elijah, while others say Jeremiah or some other prophet." "What about you?" he asked them. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." "Good for you, Simon son of John!" answered Jesus. "For this truth did not come to you from any human being, but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven."

Let us pray

Without a doubt, the person who has been depicted the most in art, down through the centuries, is Jesus. We have seen pictures of Jesus in Bibles and Bible storybooks, all of them radically different in how they depict him. Rembrandt's Jesus is very human, all light and shadow. Angelico portrays Jesus as sweet and angelic. There is Jesus, the Good Shepherd, loving, smiling, caring, and holding lambs or carrying a child in his arms. There is Jesus, the judge, with a dark severe expression, sitting on a throne, staring as if he could see right through us.

Without a doubt, the person who has been written about the most is Jesus. Whole libraries are filled with books about Jesus and almost every book gives us a different picture of Jesus. To mention just a few:

- H.S. Reimarus (early 1700s) contended that Jesus wasn't divine but was a Jewish revolutionary figure that died a disappointed failure. His disciples stole his body and made up a story about him being the redeemer. Paul spread the lie which was swallowed by a gullible world.
- Ernest Renan (mid 1800s) presented a rather romantic picture of Jesus – a strange, sweet-spirited poet walking about Galilee teaching morality. He won the hearts of many people but fell foul of the temple authorities.
- David Strauss (mid 1800s) said that the gospels were untrue and that the miracle stories were just "myths".
- Albert Schweitzer (early 1900s) portrayed Jesus as a prophet who was disappointed that God did not step in and end the world, work justice, and set things right.

In both *art* and *literature*, there are many images of Jesus and many ideas about what kind of person Jesus was. Even within Christianity, there are many different

views of Jesus. *Who is right?* The search for the historical Jesus, the Jesus as he was known back then in Palestine, has only led to confusion and uselessness. What is important is *who Jesus is today*.

In our text today, Jesus casually asks the disciples "*Who do people say I am?*" The reply came, "*Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah* (because it was believed Elijah would return) *while others say Jeremiah* (the prophet of gloom and doom) *or some other prophet.*" People who had witnessed Jesus work miracles and listened carefully when he taught about the Kingdom of God, were all guessing who this man from Nazareth really was.

Jesus wasn't interested in what others thought of him. He got straight to the point. "*What about you?*" Jesus asked the disciples. "***Who do you say that I am?***" This question is as relevant today as it was 2,000 years ago.

Mike Portnoy is a musician of a popular metal band. In an interview he was asked, "Who do you think that Jesus Christ is?" "I tend to go with the general consensus that he is God or was God or whatever. I'm not a very religious person," he continued, "but I do believe in God and I believe in Jesus Christ. To be honest, I've never been a very religious person, so that's another question that I couldn't answer from the bottom of my heart." (*Heaven's Metal #42, page 24*)

Mike Portnoy expressed what most think about Jesus; *Jesus is God or was God or whatever. That's something I can't answer from the bottom of my heart.* That means, I think Jesus was a real person but he has no effect on my life whatsoever.

What makes it even more confusing for people today is the growth of other religions within Canada – all claiming to have the truth. As a result, we have people saying that all religions are true; all are heading in the same direction, all speaking about peace and harmony. Whether you are *Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Taoist, Mahikari, Jewish* or *Christian*, it doesn't really matter. They all proclaim good living and love toward the members of your family and your friends.

A student went to her university chaplain and asked him to explain the differences between Christianity and Judaism. She was in love with a Jewish student, and they were thinking about getting married. They talked about worship, rituals, festivals, customs, traditions, prayer, and even God himself. Finally, she asked, "When it comes down to it, what is the one thing that makes Christians, Christian?"

The reply came, "The thing that makes us who we are is who Jesus is. Jesus Christ is Christianity. Other faiths have love and have beliefs about the good and the true. Only Christianity has Jesus." Jesus Christ is Christianity, and Christianity is Jesus Christ.

- We believe that God came in the flesh, as a Jew from Nazareth.
- We believe the way God saves is through Jesus.
- We believe that we have met God; we have met God as Jesus.
- We believe that the Jewish carpenter's son, who was born, lived briefly, died violently in his thirties, and rose from the dead, is God who has brought us forgiveness and hope.

We, along with Peter, confess, "*You are the Messiah, the son of the living God.*" Christianity is more than knowing biblical facts or the teachings of the church. It is more than memorizing Bible verses and Luther's Small Catechism. It is even more than doing good things for others. It is about a relationship – a relationship between God and us.

How many people have said to me that everything they had learned at confirmation classes didn't make a great deal of difference to their lives at the time of their confirmation? In fact, a lot of what they had learned had gone right over their heads. It was some time later that they became aware of what Jesus was all about; suddenly, in some cases, and, in others, more slowly, the light comes on. It's not that they were searching for more meaning in their lives and suddenly found Jesus. Rather they were minding their own business and from out of nowhere, God found them.

The Holy Spirit finally got through to them and they could see, in full detail, that their faith is all about the relationship between God and them and how this relationship now changes everything – their attitudes and their relationship with their family and others.

A man tells how he was just biding his time in a church service, looking at his watch every now and then, in order to keep himself awake during the sermon. He didn't really know what the preacher was rattling on about. In the middle of his boredom, he heard just one sentence. That one sentence grabbed him, and he began to see his faith in a totally different light. He claimed that God opened his ears to hear that one sentence and things were never the same again.

When Peter made his confession, "*You are the Messiah, the son of the living God,*" Jesus makes a point of telling him that this truth isn't something that

Peter had worked out for himself. Jesus said, "*This truth did not come to you, from any human being but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven.*"

It's our sin-stained humanity that gets in the way and clouds our understanding of God. How can we have a relationship with God when we constantly hurt him, disobey him or forget that he even exists? When we ignore his power and presence, deny any connection with him through what we say and do? In other words, we are downright awful and horrible to God, in word and deed. We don't need God's help.

But God planned from the days of Adam and Eve to send Jesus to make things right again between himself and us. God closed the gap between us; has made us members of his family at our baptism; and reaffirms his relationship with us every time we go to Holy Communion.

Whether we speak of God as we know him in the Old Testament, or see him stretched on a Roman cross, his attitude toward his people is always the same. His commitment and love are the same, and he is determined to establish a relationship with people who are unwilling even to acknowledge him.

The Bible tells story after story of God reaching to people, in love. We read about his patience with the people of Israel in the wilderness and his grace toward the thief on the cross.

We love God; we believe because God first loved us in Jesus. Christianity is not devotion to a set of rules, nor is it a set of ideas, a philosophy we might say, that leads to peace, harmony, inner peace, and good *karma*.

It is a way of life, a way of walking with Jesus, a relationship of the here and now. Christians are often looked at with a degree of scepticism, by those who don't know, when we say we believe that Jesus rose from the dead and is present with us now and that he walks with us and is closer to us than we are even to ourselves.

Mother Teresa was asked by a young man why she always talked about this Jesus stuff. The young man continued, he was going to work among the poor like her, do charity work but without the Jesus baggage.

Mother Teresa responded by saying something like, 'Go and work 20 years or a lifetime among the poorest of the poor. Then come back and tell me how you did it. I know that the only way I have been able to do it is because of Jesus.'

Her faith and understanding of Jesus, gave her the ability to be a doer, a doer not just for a week or a season or a year but for a lifetime. She was able to do work that would have turned off the bravest hearts because of her relationship with Jesus.

- As we stand around the deathbed of someone we love – Jesus is with us.
- As we try to decide which direction to take and what is the right decision – Jesus is with us.
- As we struggle with disappointment, guilt, and depression – Jesus is with us.
- As we grieve over change in the church or the lack of love in our family – Jesus is with us. By his grace, we, too, are able to say, "You are the Christ!"
You make all the difference in my life. Thanks be to God!"

Let us pray:

Holy and Immortal God, awaken us each morning with eagerness to offer ourselves in service to your Supreme Will, to escape the snares of conforming to what is of this world, and bind ourselves to your Kingdom. We ask through Jesus, Son of Man, our Blessed Messiah; and the Holy Spirit, our Counselor and Advocate, who together with You are one God, eternal, and everlasting. **Amen.**

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- The King of love, my Shepherd Is # 502
- Word of God, Come Down on Earth # 510
- Go, My Children, with My Blessing # 543

*“Happy birthday” and “Happy wedding anniversary”
to all individuals celebrating this special day
in August and September 2020*